

# BLACKWATER SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



2013 ANNUAL REPORT



SAFEGUARDING SANTA ROSA COUNTY'S  
NATURAL RESOURCES



# 2013 OVERVIEW

## "WHERE RESOURCE PROBLEMS MEET CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS"

Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was kept busy yet again this fiscal year furthering a number of resource related projects throughout Santa Rosa County. The District, along with its associate the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), always actively pursues its top objectives of protecting our natural resources to the fullest extent and fostering conservation knowledge plus awareness within the community. The District follows through on these pledges by partnering with our local landowners to provide them assistance installing conservation systems that advance healthy working landscapes and by being present at as many school and community functions as possible to break down communication barriers and champion the

need for natural resource security. The subsequent pages of this annual report give a more detailed account of the District's yearly exploits in conservation, education, and outreach.

A constant trough of low pressure this summer, in our area, produced unusually high amounts of precipitation and resulted in the wettest July on record for Florida. This wet weather hampered many of our area farmers, creating a domino effect of problems from planting to harvesting. The cotton crops were the most hurt by all this rain, with diminished pollination and crop yields. The year to year uncertainties that our farmers face

while working alongside mother nature is of a constant worry for them and can result in some very hard years for everyone.

Another uncertainty faced by farmers right now is the future of conservation programs under the current Farm Bill. The 2008 Farm Bill expired at the end of fiscal year 2012 and after that time many of the programs only continued to operate limitedly as a result of continuing resolutions. Congress will attempt again to pass a new bill in February 2014. With the prevailing climate in Washington D.C.





# OVERVIEW 2013

being one of fiscal constraint, a new Farm Bill is likely at best to see conservation program funding cuts and at worst to see a consolidation or deletion of programs. With the pressure to reduce federal spending, it seems almost certain that local landowners are likely to see less financial help with their conservation problems in the near future.

Although this would most certainly be considered by many an unwelcome change, the District as always will continue to do its best to meet the conservation needs of the

community and overcome these current challenges. The District will carry on with its goal of developing locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns and then do whatever it takes to put these sound conservation measures in place. For over 70 years now, Blackwater SWCD has been able to work side by side with many enthusiastic landowners in this county. These farmers

have chosen to be responsible stewards of the land, helping to preserve our soil and water resources. They do this not for recognition, for their hard work and struggles often go unnoticed, but because it is simply the right thing to do.





# 2013 EDUCATION



## WINNING TEAM

Jay High School  
(L to R)

Sachel Starling  
Brooklyn Linzy  
Olivia Moore  
Alisha Roberts

## HIGH SCORER (TIE)

Sachel Starling,  
Jay High School  
Madelyn Anderson,  
Milton High School

Once again this year, the District involved itself in a multitude of conservation education activities. The District takes part in all manner of events like the Land Judging Contest, the NACD Poster Contest, Bay Day, School Career Days, the Jay Library 'Dig Into Reading' Event, and the Navarre Beach Dune Restoration Project in an effort to spread awareness amongst local children on the importance of caring for and protecting our natural resources.

The annual high school event known as the Land Judging Contest, co-sponsored by the

Santa Rosa County School Board, is a decades long tradition in our area. This event provides an excuse to explore local FFA teams' knowledge of soils and soil characteristics. Students examine four sites during the competition, in which the soil has been exposed for several feet. They evaluate specific conditions at each of these sites and answer questions regarding them. The team and individual with the most correct responses wins the contest. The winning team this year was from Jay High School. There was a tie for individual high scorer by a Jay High School and a Milton High School student (see far left for students names). The contest was held this March at beautiful Pitnic Farms and was kindly offered up to us by owner Tommy Henry.





Blackwater SWCD also participated in several local career/science day events this year. Functions like these provide the District with the opportunity to speak to students, ranging from elementary through high school, about topics such as natural resources, agriculture, and our role in conservation. The soil tunnel was used many times and continues to be a successful tool with helping students explore the world of soils. The District was able to reach out and engage over 800 local children on these days.



The District joined with Three Rivers RC&D Council Inc. and the county's Navarre Beach Utilities Department in order to hold a dune restoration day this April at Navarre Beach. For the project, the District enlisted the help of the third and fourth grade students from Central Elementary with the planting of around a 1,000 young sea oat plants at the foot of the Navarre Beach Fishing Pier. The sea oats were planted as part of an ongoing effort to battle beach erosion and dune loss. The native sea oats establish extensive root systems, which are indispensable



at building and stabilizing dunes. The area needs dunes to provide a natural barrier against storm surges and high winds during severe weather events such as hurricanes and tropical storms. At the end of the day, the students were extremely proud of the work they had accomplished in preventing erosion and protecting our valuable beach resources.





# 2013 CONSERVATION



As always, conservation work remains the District's top priority. Blackwater SWCD goes about this by joining with willing landowners in order to dispense technical and financial assistance with the planning and installation of many conservation practices. Pulling from a number of flexible voluntary programs, the District and NRCS hope to assist farmers and ranchers with their resource preserving efforts while at the same time helping them sustain and enhance

their agricultural production goals.

Conservation technical assistance helps land users address concerns, problems, and future opportunities related to the use of their resources.

Information and assistance given guides clients into making sound and informed management decisions. The District has provided all kinds of technical assistance over

the years in the form of resource assessment, practice design/implementation, and follow up on installed practices. Although conservation technical assistance does not provide any financial help it is still a very useful tool for landowners, offering greater flexibility with conservation planning.

The bulk of the conservation work administered by the District is through voluntary programs mandated by the USDA Farm Bill. These programs offer landowners cost-share assistance for the implementation of site specific conservation measures. Each program, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), focuses on a distinct resource concern and requires the implementation of specific conservation practices in order to address this concern.

The goal of EQIP is to promote the



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# CONSERVATION 2013



structures. The vast majority of conservation work done in this county over the past 16 years was made possible due to EQIP funding.

Another federal program funding possibility

firebreaks, and invasive species control are all used to create and maintain a healthy working landscape for both the forest and the wildlife. Participation in WHIP has increased over the past few years, with almost 1,900 acres currently enrolled. Farm Bill program cost-share payments came in at over \$600,000 dollars this fiscal year.

overall health of natural resources by requiring the implementation of various vegetative, land management, or structural based practices that will optimize particular benefits for the environment.

Conservation practices approved for installation in our county include crop rotation, cover crop, mulch till, precision agriculture, seasonal high

tunnels, pasture planting, water wells, cross fencing, prescribed burning, firebreaks, and grade stabilization

is WHIP, which supports the reestablishment of longleaf pine forest habitat in our area. The object of the program is to reverse the decline of this critical habitat on private lands while at the same time securing future productive capacity for the landowners.

Program practices such as site prep, tree establishment, prescribed burning,

The District is fortunate to be able to work with a very supportive local landowner base, who advocate the need for making far-reaching conservation investments.



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Roosevelt





# 2013 OUTREACH



Blackwater SWCD makes every effort possible to stay active in the community, through various outreach activities, in order to reach out to all potential clients. By working with a diverse group of local organizations throughout the year, the District hopes to help as many people as possible with their resource concerns and problems.

The District and Three Rivers RC&D teamed up once again with the Magnolia Educational and Recreational Center to offer up help with their operational needs. This center offers summer school programs to local

children of various ages. A community cookout was held to honor the center's staff and students, local supporting citizens, and individuals from ARC. This event brought a lot of folks together and rendered the District with an opportunity to offer up its services to any in need.

The District also took part this July in the 47th annual Farm Tour, an event hosted by the University of Florida's IFAS Cooperative Extension

Service. Each year this tour promotes agriculture and its role in our local economy to participants. Highlights of this year's tour included local crops for local markets, 4H and FFA youth project presentations, an aerial crop spraying demonstration, and recognition of the 2013 Outstanding Farm Family Award presented to Keith Campbell's family.

## FARM TOUR 2013 STOPS:

Extension  
Office

Clear Creek  
Farm

UF WFREC

Farmers'  
Opry

Jay Flying  
Service

Gabbert  
Farm

Holland  
Farms





# HONOREES 2013

## HALL OF FAME AWARD

### Steve Duncan



Steve Duncan is a man that has spent many of his years advocating the conservation and wise use of our natural resources. His commitment

began during his career with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. He focused much of his time in Santa Rosa County, helping establish countless conservation measures on the ground. His efforts definitely had a long lasting positive impact on the natural resources of our area. After retirement, he joined

the board of the Three Rivers Resource Conservation and Development Council, a non-profit organization set up to conserve resources and improve economic conditions in Northwest Florida. He now serves as their Board President and continues his active role in the community, helping protect our soil and water resources. For his great strides in conservation, Steve was chosen to become one of the District's legendary Hall of Fame Members.

## CONSERVATION FARMER

### Randall Ashworth

Randall Ashworth is a third generation farmer from the Berrydale community. He comes from a long line of wise minded resource use folks (his grandfather helped push for the establishment of Blackwater SWCD in the early 1940's). He continues this family tradition by implementing resource friendly practices such as contour farming, terraces, cover crops, conservation tillage, and precision

agriculture on his farm. He employs these conservation strategies in order to protect and preserve the land's natural resources. He believes in doing whatever it takes to keep the soil healthy and the land viable, so it can meet the demands placed on it by future generations.





# BLACKWATER SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The District Would Like To Acknowledge The Following  
Agencies For Their Valuable Support and Cooperation:



SANTA ROSA BOARD OF  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

SANTA ROSA COUNTY  
SCHOOL BOARD

NATURAL RESOURCES  
CONSERVATION SERVICE

FARM SERVICES AGENCY



DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

FLORIDA FOREST SERVICE



EXTENSION OFFICE  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA,  
IFAS

THREE RIVERS RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, INC.



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